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ABSTRACT

The history of the early 20th century public school curriculum has established a narrative that investigates the transition from an emphasis on the liberal arts to a more functional, or useful, curriculum. This history details the influence of the developing social sciences and scientific thinking in debates among various interest groups to replace the humanities with tracks of learning that would prepare workers for an industrial society. Research has emphasized the authority of leading professional men who held administrative positions in school districts, universities, and learned societies. The voices of others, however, have been largely ignored in these historical accounts, in particular the role of women's voluntary organizations and why they supported the move toward relevance in the school curriculum. This paper, following the lead of Herbert Kliebard, uses the term "curriculum" to mean more than a list of prescribed courses, to include a broader function of schools as a reflection of certain values held by teachers, parents, administrators, and others. The paper argues that women volunteers played a pivotal role in shaping the school curriculum by interpreting and popularizing the writings of leading male educationists and social scientists. It examines the influence of the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) now the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) as a major national leader among women's associations of the Progressive Era that orchestrated national voluntary efforts to reform the school curriculum. (Contains 86 notes.) (BT)

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Mothering and Moralism during the Progressive Era: How Women's Associations Reinterpreted Science to Shape the School Curriculum

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Historical research on the public school curriculum of the early twentieth century has established a narrative that investigates the transition from an emphasis on the liberal arts to a more functional, or useful, curriculum. This history details the influence of the newly developing social sciences and scientific thinking in the debates among various interest groups to replace the humanities with tracks of learning that would prepare workers for an industrial society.[1] Such research has emphasized the authority of leading professional men that held administrative positions in school districts, universities, and learned societies. William Torrey Harris, G. Stanley Hall, and Charles William Eliot are among those academicians and political leaders whose works frame the history of this sea change in the course of study. However, the voices of others have been largely ignored in these historical accounts, in particular the role of women's voluntary organizations and why they supported the move toward relevance in the school curriculum.

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In this chapter I use the term "curriculum" to mean more than a list of prescribed courses in order to include the broader function of schools as a reflection of certain values held by teachers, parents, administrators, and others. In so doing, I am following the lead of Herbert Kliebard who posits that curriculum "is the ambiguous outcome of a complex interplay between certain social conditions and prevailing conceptions of how schools are supposed to function."[2] I argue that women volunteers played a pivotal role in shaping the school curriculum by interpreting and popularizing the writings of leading male educationists and social scientists. In so doing, clubwomen helped shape the goals and purposes of education, in one sense by lobbying for changes in the formal course of study, and in large part by helping to remake schools into social welfare institutions. They did so by emphasizing mothering as a civic duty. The white, middle-class women who led major national organizations sought to teach parenting skills in order to create a better society and by 1900 they were steadfast in working toward that goal through the public schools.

Surprisingly little is known about educational reformers outside of professional roles who saw in the school curriculum the means to shape families and society. During the Progressive era, a powerful national network of women's clubs exerted influence from town to city around the United States. Women in local clubs directed by state and national leaders of federated associations met regularly to address common concerns around parenting and sought to reform local public schools as an extension of the role of mothering and their commitment to municipal housekeeping.[3] This chapter examines the influence of the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) as a major national leader among

women's associations of the Progressive era that orchestrated national voluntary efforts to reform the school curriculum.

Known today as the National Parent-Teacher Association, or PTA, the NCM originated in 1897 as a one-time national meeting to promote the latest in social science research regarding the welfare of children in home, school, and society. As a result of its immediate popular success, the NCM became incorporated as a national association in 1898 and continued its child-welfare work over the course of the twentieth century. To date, scholars have generally overlooked the educational efforts of the NCM and instead have focused on its importance in social welfare legislation.[4] Such works probe the nationally orchestrated efforts of the NCM and other women's groups in passing mothers' pension legislation and the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act[5] and attest to the power wielded by organized women during this era. Due to the plethora of research on women's clubs and associations, we have come to learn much about the reform that women enacted through voluntary roles that affected labor, commerce, and politics. However, education was central to the mission of women's associations. For example, in the late nineteenth century women's study clubs served as a kind of university for women when access to such institutions was not widely available.[6] Historians of education recently have begun to acknowledge the role of clubwomen in shaping educational institutions, curriculum, professional standards, and auxiliary services. In a recent study, William J. Reese claims that during the Progressive era, clubwomen "influenced every important administrative change, curricular reform, and social service established in local cities."[7]

The women leaders at the national and state levels of the NCM were very much like the professional educators Kliebard portrays who "saw in the course of study the vehicle for the expression of their ideas and the accomplishment of their purposes."[8] And, for nearly all of these reformers, new developments in research on childhood and education influenced curricular decisions. Therefore, for the purposes of this chapter, I use Kliebard's three different interpretations of the meaning of science at the turn of the twentieth century for different interest groups in order to locate the ideology of the Mothers' Congress among leading male professional thinkers. In his study of the struggles in regard to the school curriculum, Kliebard defines the scientism of G. Stanley Hall as a science of the "natural order of the development of the child," which emphasized health issues. The rhetoric of Alice Birney, the founder and first president of the NCM, echoed Hall's evangelized theories about childhood and children's natural development. A second meaning of science to emerge during this era was the doctrine of social efficiency, which attempted to apply exact measurement and precise standards in order to create a predictable and orderly world. This definition was embodied in the very associations of women who saw organized reform as a way to effect change and to spread woman's moral influence. A third type of science, much less used by leading curriculum reformers and clubwomen, was John Dewey's brand of "idealization of scientific inquiry as a general model of reflective thinking."[9]

The NCM combined Hall's child-study science with the urgency and direction of the social efficiency experts in order to create a salve for what they perceived to be a society burdened with poverty, child endangerment, and parental incompetence. The NCM's interpretation of science had a social uplift quality and it emphasized prevention

over reform, a notion borrowed from the kindergarten movement.[10] This emphasis on prevention added the dimension of social meliorism to the efforts of Birney and other NCM leaders who viewed parent education as the means to a better society. In this discussion, the distinctions among the various interest groups and their definitions of science is not as important as it is to note that NCM leaders were not humanists supporting the classical curriculum proposed by the 1893 National Education Association's Committee of Ten, but developmentalists who combined knowledge in child growth with an adherence to the standards of efficiency. The NCM thereby infused developments in science—a term they defined broadly—with their maternalist philosophy in an effort to remake the world according to traditional feminine values.[11]

This chapter is organized into two sections. The first outlines the educational philosophy of NCM founder, Alice McLellan Birney, to serve as an example of the way nonprofessional women interpreted theorists' standpoints to their own educational ends. Herbert Spencer and G. Stanley Hall, two leading behaviorists of the late nineteenth century whose notions about the functional curriculum eventually won out over a humanist public school curriculum in the twentieth century, provided the main inspiration to Birney's thinking. I argue that Birney interpreted their writings according to her own goals for women's education that included valuing women's roles as mothers in an effort to rework the school curriculum to value childrearing. I then examine how the philosophy of the NCM came to bear on school curriculum, suggesting that it relied on a vast network of associations in alliance with the well-established General Federation of Women's Clubs. The influence of clubwomen under the auspices of the NCM and other women's organizations worked to support women's nurturing role in the curriculum by

implementing health reforms, promoting organized motherhood, and instituting kindergartens as a form of social meliorism. I begin with two leading theorists who shaped the functional curriculum and the clubwoman who reinterpreted their positions for a willing audience of nonprofessional women reformers.

Science for Mothering

Curricular changes are shaped just as much by external forces—social, political, and economic trends and the machinations of interest groups and laypersons—as they are the product of professional direction. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, various educators and interest groups began to rethink the school curriculum during a time when the role of schooling radically changed. Amid the brisk pace of industrialism, immigration, and urbanization, schools were transformed to become "mediating institutions between" the family and society.[12] In a rapidly changing social order, there was little agreement on the knowledge that should be imparted in public schools. Questions about what knowledge was of most worth and how to reshape the school curriculum according to this knowledge were central in these curricular discussions of this era. The question of worthy knowledge was first posed by sociologist Herbert Spencer and later applied to the school curriculum by psychologist G. Stanley Hall. In large part, Hall's notions were popularized in public schools through a voluntary network of women's clubs.

In the mid-nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer applied Darwinian thought to the development of knowledge and social relationships. His 1859 essay "What Knowledge is of Most Worth?" triggered a revolution in thinking about the school curriculum as it

challenged the idea of a liberal arts education.[13] Spencer's notions about the functional goals of school curriculum first made waves in his native England, and later entered American educational parlance in the late nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, Spencer's functional criteria for the development of curriculum was a major revolution in that it did not follow selecting the "great cultural resources of Western culture," but instead focused on life experience as the basis for determining what was worth knowing, and therefore teaching.[14] Spencer outlined five criteria that categorized the leading life activities that were to determine school curriculum:

"1. those activities which directly minister to self-preservation;

2. those activities which, by securing the necessaries of life, indirectly minister to self-preservation;

3. those activities which have for their end the rearing and discipline of offspring;

4. those activities which are involved in the maintenance of proper social and political relations;

5. those miscellaneous activities which fill up the leisure part of life, devoted to the gratification of tastes and feelings."[15]

For Spencer, what was ornamental was less valuable than the practical, thereby positioning education as having a use beyond itself, for a future life. This contrasted with the liberal arts, which emphasized learning for its own sake or to develop particular mental faculties.

In the decades to come, professional and layperson alike deliberated Spencer's revolutionary line of reasoning. According to Kliebard, his doctrine influenced the American curriculum in three ways. First, it placed the sciences in a more prominent

position in the secondary school curriculum. Next, it positioned curriculum as a "reflection of natural laws governing both the course of human history and the development of the individual." Finally, Spencer's philosophy altered thinking about curriculum as a means to an end.[16] While these ideas eventually ended up realigning the purposes of education to serve future employment, his third criterion, which placed a value on childrearing as a central life activity, resonated with clubwomen. Spencer's theory suggested that the education of women should eschew the ornamental in order to prepare them for future roles as wives and mothers, an idea that inspired clubwomen to promote parent education in the school curriculum.

After 1900, psychologist G. Stanley Hall pressed for a curriculum influenced by Spencer's notion of natural law. Whereas Spencer applied Darwinian thought to society, Hall wanted to become the "Darwin of the mind."[17] Hall is perhaps most well known for originating child study, which he first presented in an 1882 speech to the superintendents of the National Education Association. He followed this with an empirical study of children, "The Contents of Children's Minds," in 1883. The focus of Hall's child study program maintained that physical development and health were the proper foundation of mental and moral development.[18] Therefore, for Hall, health became "the all-controlling factor in directing educational policy, and he feared that early intellectual training might be detrimental to the health of children and even adolescents."[19] Moreover, Hall promoted child study as a means to determine how to teach children and organize curriculum; "Hall's main interest was to use behavioral-science knowledge to create a science of pedagogy."[20] Though he abandoned the child-study idea in 1885, Hall picked it up again in the early 1890s when it was embraced by the growing association of

women's national organizations who favored child study. As laywomen had interpreted the scientific psychology as a pedagogical enterprise, Hall capitalized on this fervor, "quickly exploiting the ground swell of interest."[21]

In one notable public opinion Hall challenged the National Education Association's Committee of Ten Report of 1893. The Committee of Ten had been charged with making recommendations for the secondary school curriculum in order to better prepare students for college. The Committee, under the leadership of Charles W. Eliot, the president of Harvard University, recommended four strands of liberal curriculum that made no distinction between those students going to college and those who would not.[22] Hall reacted to these recommendations by harboring the accusation that they "enforc[ed] artifacts of both method and matter, and sacrific[ed] the interests of the vast majority who will never go to college."[23] Therefore, Hall's disagreement with the classical curriculum recommendations of the Committee of Ten led him to promote a curriculum that favored differentiation and vocationalism, but he also promoted the education of women for "motherhood and homelife,"[24] since a practical education was by definition gender specific. Such ideas were emphasized by others, like University of Chicago social studies professor Albion Small, whose 1896 address to the NEA, "Demands of Sociology upon Pedagogy" supported a widening horizons curriculum that began with a study of the household and grew outward.[25] Whether these theorists intended for women to champion the emphasis on childrearing and parenting is uncertain, although the Congress of Mothers did so. In the end, Hall's position won out over the humanist curriculum proposed by the Committee of Ten as Spencer's emphasis on self-preservation became for different interest groups the obvious starting point to rework the

school curriculum for twentieth-century needs. However, the curriculum reform could not occur without widespread public support, which was something the vast networks of women's associations provided.

Hall inspired and later mentored clubwoman Alice Birney, who initiated the National Congress of Mothers in 1896. Birney was well versed in the writings of Hall, Spencer, and kindergarten innovator Friedrich Froebel because these authors were favored by clubwomen of the late nineteenth century. Her read of these theorists gave credence to women's nurturing role as it validated the mission of her association. At successive annual meetings of the Congress of Mothers she shared her views on the importance of these works in directing women's education away from the college and toward the home. In one instance she remarked on Froebel's characterization of scientific motherhood, which had a decidedly spiritual component: "When a mother in her own home applies what she may learn from [Froebel's] books, reverently studying the threefold nature of the immortal being committed to her care, she will acquire the truest, finest culture the world can offer, and then knowledge will be added to love, mother-patience, and gentleness—attributes which transcend all learning."[26] Birney was especially fond of mentioning Spencer's influence. In 1905 speech she reminded her audience of a "book written long ago by Herbert Spencer entitled 'Education.' If you think child-study through other mediums than your own limited experience a theory, read that book; it will change your conviction as no argument of mine could ever do."[27]

Birney was born in the South in 1858, the oldest of three daughters of a former slave owner. She had been educated in private academies in the South that trained young women in an ornamental curriculum suitable for the daughters of Georgia's planter class.

The curriculum included drawing, painting, needlework, instrumental and vocal music, and language instruction.[28] After leaving Marietta, however, Birney was exposed to a curriculum of a different kind when she attended Mount Holyoke Seminary in 1875. Her year at Mount Holyoke exposed her to a course of study that was known to be comparable to that of the men's institutions. Mount Holyoke's liberal arts curriculum that favored Latin, algebra, and geometry prepared young women for lives of service, teaching, and missionary work.[29] In 1892, Birney married into a progressive family in the Washington, DC-area and moved to the affluent Chevy Chase, Maryland where she raised her three daughters. The influence of her husband and his family gave her the financial support and ideological means she needed to bring to fruition her idea of a clearinghouse of information on childrearing, kindergarten work, and health issues. With rhetorical flair and organizational acumen, Birney convened the National Congress of Mothers in 1897 by enlisting nationally known kindergarten workers and the financial support of Washington, DC, socialite and philanthropist Phoebe Apperson Hearst.

The NCM's first meeting was successful beyond its organizers' expectations for two reasons. Congress leaders launched an extensive publicity campaign and promoted a platform that emphasized traditional roles for women. Using the press in this way helped contribute to the NCM's uniqueness among the national women's organizations of this era, and contributed to its high visibility and ability to spread ideas to homes and women's clubs around the country.[30] Moreover, its emphasis on traditional roles for women sided with those who were at odds with the growing momentum of the suffrage movement and expanding opportunities for women in higher education. However, Birney's overtly conservative platform did not dissuade more progressive or radical

reformers from using the NCM's annual meetings or widely read publications to promote one cause or another. For example, socialist reformer Florence Kelley, spoke at the 1900 annual meeting of the Congress of Mothers on "Unseen Dangers to Childhood, Resulting from Present Industrial Conditions" and two years later agreed to chair the organization's Committee on Child Labor in order to publicize the plight of working children.[31]

Under Birney's leadership, the Mothers' Congress in part became the embodiment of Hall's theories as he returned to successive annual meetings as a keynote speaker. Birney rekindled Hall's child study theory and encouraged clubwomen to discuss the new psychology and child study in mothers' clubs and parent-teacher associations. Hall told the members of the Mothers' Congress that he saw "large promise" in both education and science through their child study circles.[32] He proclaimed child study the "woman's science," a point relished by Birney. NCM leaders, many of them affiliated also with the GFWC, promoted a science of motherhood with the mystical fervor of Hall. He also supported teaching to gender differences,[33] a point that was not lost on NCM members who wished to devise a school curriculum that taught a gender-specific curriculum to boys and girls. However, Hall's curriculum ideas were drawn less from scientific study than they were "from his metaphysical, even mystical, assumptions about the alleged relationship between the stages in individual development and the history of the human race,"[34] a position shared by the NCM.

In the foreword to Birney's 1904 book, *Childhood,* Hall declared that the book presents "the substance of what parents most need to know in order to make their influence more felt for good upon the rising generation."[35] Birney explained the reason for her book is that "There is no vocation which calls for a higher order of character

development than parenthood, and to be a wise as well as good mother or father requires consecration and concentration."[36] As such, her volume was directed at promoting character education for a middle-class readership, whom she identifies as the "great mass of American mothers."[37] It was never intended to be a scientific manual on the care and feeding of infants; rather, it was a character-training guide for the middle-class parent that fused thinking in science, health, and education. Though steeped in elitist assumptions, Birney did attempt to cross class barriers. For instance she explained, "sometimes it happens that the young son of your laundress may be better behaved and have better principles than the son of your rich neighbor."[38] Elitism won out, for throughout *Childhood* Birney suggested families should spend summers in the mountains or at the seashore, with little reference as to who might be able to afford these sojourns. Likewise, she promoted the reading of Shakespeare, Goethe, Dante, Milton, and Shelley beginning at age ten and continuing "onward throughout life"[39] without a word as to the literacy education of immigrants or the lower classes.

Birney's middle-class audience was further exposed to the principles expounded at NCM annual meetings and through its publications. They were principles influenced by the precepts of science and health. Birney was a major promoter of the twentieth century ideal of scientific motherhood. The NCM's science emphasized morality and religion of the antebellum years; it was a philosophy that used science to the ends of morality infused with a religious fervor.[40] Birney's view of the important science for mothering included the study of "Heredity, prenatal influence, early environment, hygiene, the temperament of the child, discipline, ideals, and subjects of a more general character, such, for example, as the sanitary conditions of the home."[41]

The educational philosophy shaped by scientific thinking of the NCM was therefore partially attributed to Hall's belief in child development, but it also assumed the social efficiency emphasis of the likes of government botanist and geologist Lester Frank Ward. Ward was influenced by Darwinian theory, but took the opposite position of Spencer in its application to human beings. Ward claimed that humans had the power to intervene intelligently. "Civilization, he argued, was not achieved by letting cosmic natural forces take their course, but by the power of intelligent action to change things for the better."[42] This approach was echoed by Birney and the women of the NCM who sided with the kindergarteners who advocated prevention over reform. In regard to the heredity versus nurture debate, a popular topic on the NCM annual meeting agenda in the early years, Birney remarked upon the collective sigh of relief of men and women who "have carried in their hearts the gnawing fear of inherited evils [and who now] imbibe fresh courage and listen eagerly to the methods by which the evil tendencies may be overcome."[43] The end goal of motherhood was a suitable goal for NCM women within the new functional curriculum that was designed toward students' future lives.

Alice Birney's rhetoric and writings reveal the influence of G. Stanley Hall and his ideas; her writings echo his flamboyant and sentimental style that was laden with religious imagery.[44] In an early speech that reflects Hall's style, Alice Birney declared at the second Congress of mothers that "the limit of a civilization is found in the aspiration of its motherhood." Therefore, the purpose of the NCM was to "consider the divine function of maternity, and study its relation to a higher civilization."[45] She promoted the notion that women should defer to men in matters of business and worldliness and emphasized traditional gender roles and education for motherhood as a primary goal.

Regarding the education of women, Birney felt the ornamental and liberal arts education were second to motherhood education, which was functional and practical. She explained, "It would be of infinite advantage to the childhood of the world if every young woman could, in the course of her education, have at least one year in a kindergarten training school."[46] However, Birney was careful not to promote ignorance. She considered ignorance a great evil, but explained, "I do not mean ignorance of Greek, Latin, higher mathematics, literature or any of the many attractive forms in which learning appeals to us, but ignorance of those things which vitally concern the child's well-being."[47]

Birney's leadership of the NCM was short-lived, though her ideas remained a part of the Congress for a long time to come. Succeeding her was Philadelphia socialite Hannah Kent Schoff, who served as the organization's president from 1902 until 1920. Schoff's leadership and organizational expertise contrasted with Birney's idealism and sentimental view of womanhood. Though Schoff was portrayed like so many subsequent NCM presidents, as a mother and wife, she took a more no-nonsense approach to her presidency and initiated significant reform work in the juvenile justice system. However, Schoff kept the NCM more integrally involved in curriculum reform measures by building the organization through the schools and becoming a member of the NEA Department of Women's Associations. Schoff's leadership of one of the major women's associations of the first two decades of the early twentieth century serves to illustrate the curriculum reform work undertaken by lay women and their application of their own brand of science to shape a curriculum based on future life roles as parents instead of workers. This curriculum valued health reforms, parent education, and the kindergarten.

Science for Moralism

B. Edward McClellan argues that the supporters of the functional curriculum lobbed the "first serious challenge" to moral education, which during the nineteenth century had been central in the school curriculum. "As schools began to teach students the new social, academic, and vocational skills required by a complex corporate and bureaucratic order, moral education was forced to compete for a place in an increasingly crowded curriculum."[48] However, this dilemma was not present for the NCM and those nonprofessional women who favored parent education as central to the relevant curriculum, since parenting necessarily included an emphasis on moral education.

In documents of the NCM, the language of science, health, psychology, and child study were abundant and presented as a moral imperative to clubwomen around the nation. As discussed above, ideas spread through a well-orchestrated network of circulars and news articles, in-house publications, annual national and state meetings, and face-to-face gatherings of interested women. Clubwomen are often overlooked in the scholarship, largely because they did not represent the academic leaders of these various movements. However, their work through voluntary associations effected significant change on the curricular landscape. An examination of clubwomen's participation in educational reform during the Progressive era through major voluntary organizations can illuminate gendered notions of curricular reform as well as contribute to the history of curriculum by adding a citizen's perspective to the theorist's outlook.

In 1899, at the third gathering of the National Congress of Mothers, founder and first president Alice Birney proclaimed, "National evils require national remedies. I

claim, without hesitancy, the greatest evil today is the incompetency, the ignorance of parents, and it is because of this evil that others exist."[49] As outlined above, the Congress of Mothers developed a fluid definition of science as inspired by Spencer and Hall. However, this interpretation of the functional curriculum emphasized the care of children and not the world of work. This section addresses the question How did the rhetoric of the NCM translate into practice in matters of curriculum? It sketches the scientific curriculum reforms of the NCM and other women's clubs. It is not intended to be a comprehensive review, but suggestive of the curriculum changes brought to bear by the NCM and other women's associations. In particular, I examine health reforms, the impact of efficiency, and attempts at social meliorism through the school curriculum. Each of these overlapping reforms reflects clubwomen's interpretation of science in the early twentieth century and their desire for a more practical school curriculum.

Health Reform

Clubwomen's health reform efforts had the most significant impact on the school curriculum. The NCM and the GFWC led the coordination of national efforts through local clubs to carry out curriculum reform in the areas of health and sanitation. This included initiating health inspections, better-ventilated schools, and school lunches, and putting into place drinking fountains, school nurses, and playgrounds. Among the chorus of reformers during the Progressive era, Alice Birney pointed out the poor ventilation in schools due to "the overcrowding of many of the grades."[50] Hygiene was of particular concern to limit the spread of disease. Like many women's clubs around the nation, these curricular reforms involved school plumbing. For example a club in Illinois

reported that it had introduced "bubble fountains and proper toilets for boys" in the early 1900s.[51]

In these vast efforts to reform schools, the NCM did not intend to perpetuate long-term contributions to public education. As in their social welfare reform work they sought to "transform public policy, to move from personal and private encounter to state action, to bring about compulsory legislation of one sort or another."[52] Thus, the NCM's local clubs enacted reforms that they handed over to school authorities and boards of education to run. For example, the vacation schools that were begun in Chicago in the 1890s by the woman's club were turned over in 1911 to the board of education. In Kentucky, the white school improvement leagues had been "placed directly under the control of the state department of education and a paid officer has been placed in the office of the superintendent of instruction, to organize and to supervise the leagues." And, in Minnesota in 1910, the medical inspector and nurse initiated the NCM were handed over to the school system to maintain.[53] In California in 1916, the clinics started by that state's Congress of Mothers were taken over by the schools.[54]

In many cases, the NCM continued to assist the health professionals. For example, the Summer Round-Up Program that began in 1925 was assisted in large part by NCM volunteers to ensure its success in identifying children of school age and bringing them to schools for health inspections. Meals for schoolchildren were offered as early as the 1890s, as recommended by Massachusetts Institute of Technology chemist and home economics innovator Ellen Swallow Richards. By 1913, three dozen cities had meal services, each one having been initiated by clubwomen through the NCM and GFWC. In general, by World War I, schools took over the meal service and at this time

over one hundred cities had meals for lower class children.[55] Women volunteers continued to help administer the meals. Thus, the success of clubwomen was far-reaching in regard to initiating health measures and instituting them in public schools. These changes did not directly have an impact on the formal school curriculum; instead, they influenced the broader curriculum of schools as social welfare institutions. With nurses, health check-ups, lunches, and other innovations initiated by non-professional women and assumed by school districts, the purpose and function of schools was shaped. Clubwomen's health reforms were wide-ranging and effective as they were directed as much at the middle classes as they were the lower classes and immigrants.

Efficiency and Organized Motherhood

The Mothers' Congress was able to successfully implement extensive health reforms due to their adherence to the doctrine of efficiency. Although William J. Reese argues that clubwomen effectively staved off total victory by the advocates of efficiency, he overlooks the fact that clubwomen enacted their own brand of efficiency in education to initiate health initiatives and promote parent education.[56] They were more successful with the former as parent education never became a part of the formal school curriculum in the way Alice Birney envisioned.

The principles of organization and efficiency led the NCM to study local schools in order to make recommendations to school boards for improvement. In this sense, they were applying the dictates of scientific study to their school reform initiatives. Revealing the influence of Spencer, Birney reported in 1900 that organized mothers "have regarded their children *first of all as future mothers and fathers,* next as citizens, and they are demanding that public educational systems adopt their standards of values in the

adjustment of curricula."[57] Women's club leaders therefore encouraged their members to investigate their local schools' curricula, but refrain from suggesting any particular program or course of study.[58] This tactic reflected a tacit support of women teachers, many of whom were club members. Club leaders explained to members, "While we have a right to say to the professional educators of the Nation, 'You must give our children the training which will make them efficient and reliable men and women and good citizens,' we must remember that we have not the right to say by what text books and by what methods they shall do it. That is a professional matter and must be left to the educators themselves."[59] Nonetheless, friction resulted in many of these school-study undertakings. In Pennsylvania one educator remarked that the criticisms regarding the inefficiency of schools were not to be taken seriously since they came mainly from "the old maids in the Civic Club."[60] However, success was attained as systematic studies of school conditions prompted educational reforms around the nation. In one notable example, white women of the Atlanta School Improvement Committee in 1913 surveyed the school conditions in black schools and found them deplorable. They appealed to white religious leaders and other white women in the Atlanta area for support. Their efforts resulted in a temporary school building and higher salaries for the black teachers there.[61]

Organization and efficiency were to serve organized motherhood and suggest not only the kind of education that girls and young women were to receive, but where it was to take place. With the founding of the GFWC in 1892, first president Charlotte Hawkins Brown commented on the importance of mother education, but suggested it belonged in local clubs rather than in the humanistic curriculum of the schools. "Girls find good elementary instruction in schools, but only practice, such as clubs give can make that

instruction available in the battle of life."[62] However, by 1900 Alice Birney had embraced the principles of a functional curriculum and was among those clubwomen to position schools as the proper places for parent education. She argued that the ennui suffered by college women after graduation was reason enough for preparation for childrearing and other family duties. She claimed there was a "serious menace in any education which at the close of a four-year period sends a girl to her home discontented with her environment; unkindly critical of her parents and former associates; longing for a career; [and] impatient with the interruptions inseparable from family life."[63]

Into the early twentieth century, nonprofessional women promoted the idea through periodicals and journals and at annual meetings, asking rhetorically, "Does it not seem strange that training for duties that will devolve upon the vast majority of men and women, in the rearing of children, should be omitted from their education?"[64] Among the curricular changes at the turn of the twentieth century, the NCM's promotion of parenting in the schools began as early as 1899. A paper by Mary Roberts Smith, a faculty member at Stanford, spoke on the subject "Does the Curriculum of Schools and Colleges Fit Young Men and Women for the Duties of Life?"[65] Women leaders to promote this type of education sought to value the duties of women in the school curriculum and to legitimate the home among other social institutions and "to show that home making is a worth occupation for the most gifted."[66] These early calls relied on science to give these areas credibility during a time when the boundaries between amateur and professional were not fully established. Women like Birney argued that "the proper practice of motherhood demanded esoteric knowledge," thereby allowing women like her to "reconcile their intellectual interests with their everyday lives in the home."[67]

Clubwomen were among a diverse group of reformers of the Progressive era to promote vocational education, manual training, and domestic science in the functional curriculum. "The dignity of cooking," said one columnist, is "its scientific value, [which] must be instilled through the public school."[68] According to Jane Bernard Powers, clubwomen wanted to teach domestic science as a way to ensure the perpetuation of municipal housekeeping reforms into the twentieth century.[69] The home economics movement began as early as 1899, with the first meeting of the American Home Economics Association in Lake Placid, New York.[70] The movement was a conservative counter to vocational and commercial education, which was geared to prepare women for the world of work. For the NCM and Birney, working women were to be viewed with pity, since they had to support their families through waged labor. Instead, home economics and domestic science were thought to fit women with knowledge for a well ordered home.[71] One of the main appeals of domestic science programs was to address the "servant problem" of middle-class women of this era, who saw in domestic science a means to prepare young women to work in their homes before they became wives and mothers themselves.[72]

Other women's interest groups, like the National Women's Trade Union League, had different goals in vocational education for women that emphasized preparing young women to support themselves.[73] Early on, the National Society for the Promotion of Industrial Education, the principle lobby for vocational education organized in 1906, did not focus on domestic science,[74] but clubwomen were successful in promoting the agenda and eventfully home economics received its biggest push after the passage of Smith-Hughes Act in 1918. Smith-Hughes solidified the place of home economics in the school

curriculum by providing funding for supervisors at the local, state, and national levels; disseminating prescriptive literature for teachers; and launching further campaigns to cover funding. However, the education for parenthood sought by clubwomen was not a part of, nor did it become integral to the home economics movement, which Powers argues ended up becoming nothing more than cooking and sewing classes at the junior high level. [75]

However, the PTA was successful in initiating the parent education movement, which was at its peak beginning in the 1920s. Parent education took place by that time took place in volunteer groups outside of the confines of the school curriculum and, as Julia Grant argues, it was an effective strategy to reach parents.[76] Though parent education was not a part of the school curriculum for young men and women as Birney had originally hoped, it did promote a goal she originally articulated in 1899: "We are just trying to get parents to feel that they want to know more. We want to get them to go back and go to school again."[77]

Social Meliorism and Morality

As discussed above, clubwomen's definition of science combined health with efficiency toward the goal of reforming society, or social meliorist aims. In 1899, clubwoman and educator M.A. Cassidy declared, "The schoolhouse is the best crime preventive that has yet been discovered."[78] Cassidy reiterated a common sentiment of kindergarteners that viewed prevention as preferable to reform efforts; it was a recurring refrain in Alice Birney's writings. These educational visionaries saw in education the possibility to shape the world for the better through a curriculum geared to creating moral citizens and better parents. And, like kindergarteners, the NCM promoted mothers'

meetings or parents' meetings to facilitate communication between home and school. Likewise, the NCM worked for the implementation of kindergartens as part of the public schools around the country based on their reading of the works that supported this innovation.[79] Kindergartens ended up becoming the only educational innovation that can be counted as a formal curricular success of the NCM.

The functional curriculum had a moral dimension for NCM leaders in that it held the possibility to teach young citizens the proper morals by emphasizing parenthood over future employment. Birney had reminded the public of her belief that "in all professions and vocations the standards are higher than formerly, and the world's call is for trained and skilled workers in every field, save that of parenthood."[80] The NCM carried this belief to the Department of Women's Associations of the NEA as it shared its commitment to the schools in producing "three results in pupils—knowledge, efficiency, and character; therefore, we will make the effort to introduce into all schools training for the hand as well as for the head, and definite instruction in ethics and civics."[81] Clubwomen's full support of teaching ethics in the public schools waned into the 1920s as the National Congress of Mothers retreated from overt political activism and became an auxiliary to the public schools. Instead, the NCM was successful in promoting moral training and character education through localized settings in groups and clubs outside of the formal school curriculum.[82]

In 1918, the NEA produced the Cardinal Principles Report, which traced its lineage to Spencer's ideas, and which successfully reoriented "the curriculum on categories of vital life activities."[83] However, the vital life activities that ended up driving the curriculum were not those that Birney wanted to see in the school curriculum,

the rearing and discipline of offspring. Instead the seven cardinal principles—health, command of fundamental processes, vocation, worthy use of leisure time, worthy home membership, citizenship, and ethical character—were nebulous and omitted parenting as a specific end to education. Nonetheless, the NCM, supported and promoted the seven cardinal principles to its local units as the purposes of education through parent-teacher cooperation. It was a compromise that still valued the home, though it dealt much less explicitly with child rearing and child welfare.

Conclusion

Curriculum history that examines the transition from humanism to utility generally omits the voices of nonprofessional women who were largely influential during this era and who saw in the functional curriculum the potential to value motherhood. The ideas of women club leaders can be traced to Herbert Spencer and G. Stanley Hall, whose theories appealed to lay women because they valued women's work. Echoing an early argument of Spencer's, one clubwomen claimed that "All education should include in some measure training for self-maintenance. . . of both men and women."[84] But self-maintenance came to be interpreted by male school leaders as preparation for the world of work, and not education for the welfare of children. Therefore, the goal of the NCM to reorder the values of the school curriculum around parenting was never reached.

However, the NCM and other women's associations were successful in enacting reforms that integrated different interpretations of science during the Progressive era. What Kliebard argues were "three seemingly irreconcilable reform thrusts" in the early twentieth century: behaviorism, social efficiency, and social meliorism, [85] were actually

combined in practice by the NCM and women's clubs since the 1890s under their overarching ideology that sought to value childrearing. The NCM popularized G. Stanley Hall's sentimental developmentalist ideas and initiated wide-ranging health reforms in public schools between 1900 and 1920. Efficiency also influenced Congress leaders who wished to remake society by applying principles of order to their work in education. In so doing, NCM women predated the male educators' social efficiency as applied to the school curriculum, which by 1918 had reached its zenith and "was being recognized as a vital subspecialty within the broader spectrum of education."[86] Finally, the NCM's social meliorist goals were continued through the 1920s and 1930s by social studies educators George Counts and Harold Rugg.

The NCM's success was mixed, as its vision, originally put forth by founder and first president Alice Birney in 1897 never was fully realized. Among its successes were the implementation of auxiliary reforms, such as school nurses and kindergartens, but the reordering of the curriculum according to maternal values never took place due to wider curricular struggles that emphasized education for the world of commerce. As the twentieth century progressed, the NCM and other women's associations played a more supportive and cooperative role as their leadership of curricular reforms was contained and managed by professionals.

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[1] This argument is put forth in Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum: 1893-1958* 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 1995) and Herbert M. Kliebard, *Schooled to Work: Vocationalism and the American Curriculum, 1876-1946* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999). Kliebard's interpretation is challenged in William G. Wraga, "A Progressive Legacy Squandered: *The Cardinal Principles* Report Reconsidered," *History of Education Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (2001): 494-519.

[2] Herbert M. Kliebard, *Forging the American Curriculum: Essays in Curriculum History and Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1992), xiv.

[3] "Municipal housekeeping," according to Anne Firor Scott, held that women's "responsibility did not end with the four walls of a home, but extended to the neighborhood, the town, the city." Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 141. See especially Chapter 5, "Self-Improvement, Community Improvement."

[4] See, for example, Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[5] Also known as the Federal Act for the Promotion of the Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy, the Sheppard-Towner Act supported educational programs and free clinics for mothers beginning in 1921 but was repealed in 1929. For fuller discussions of these reforms, see Skocpol, Muncy, and Ladd-Taylor.

[6] For studies that examine the self-culture and self-education aspects of women's clubs, see Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980); Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women's Study Clubs, 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987); and Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U. S. Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[7] William J. Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform: Grassroots Movements during the Progressive Era* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 40. Reese makes this assertion even though he researches only the clubwomen's efforts in four mid-sized cities. Nonetheless, based on my research, his assessment holds for urban and rural regions around the United States.

[8] Kliebard, *Struggle*, xv.

[9] Kliebard, *Struggle*, 77.

[10] For a thorough history of the kindergarten movement, see Barbara Beatty, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

[11] Julia Grant, *Raising Baby by the Book: The Education of American Mothers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 57. Ladd-Taylor defines maternalism as an ideology "rooted in the nineteenth century doctrine of separate spheres and to a presumption of women's economic and social dependence on men." In short, it was a kind of social motherhood. *Mother-Work*, 2, 3.

[12] Kliebard, *Struggle*, 1. William W. Cutler, *Parents and Schools: The 150-Year Struggle for Control in American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). This notion was supported by contemporary educators who argued "The school is the transition stage from life in the home to life in the state." George R. Brown, "The Home and the School," *School and Home Education* 18, no. 1 (1898): 16.

[13] Charles W. Eliot, "Introduction," *Essays on Education, etc. by Herbert Spencer*(New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1949), vii.

[14] Kliebard, *Forging*, 32.

[15] Herbert Spencer, *Essays on Education, Etc.* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc. [orig. pub. 1860] 1946), 7. See also Kliebard, *Forging*, 31.

[16] Kliebard, *Forging*, 39-40.

[17] Kliebard, *Forging*, 42.

[18] Dorothy Ross, *G. Stanley Hall: The Psychologist as Prophet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 126, 293, 305, 306. See also Kliebard, *Struggle*, 37.

[19] Kliebard, *Forging*, 42-43.

[20] Steven Schlossman, "Before Home Start: Notes Toward a History of Parent Education in America," *Harvard Educational Review* 46, no. 3 (1976): 441. See also Kliebard, *Struggle*, 37.

[21] Ross, *The Psychologist as Prophet*, 131, 260.

[22] U. S. Department of Education, "The Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies," in *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1892-1893* (Washington, D.C., 1895).

[23] Hall, "G. Stanley Hall's Criticism of the Committee of Ten," in Sol Cohen, ed., *Historical Documents in American Education*.

[24] Kliebard, *Struggle*, 41, 93-94. See also *NEA Proceedings*, 1903, 446-51.

[25] Kliebard, *Struggle*, 53.

[26] Mrs. Theodore W. Birney, "Address of Welcome," *The Work and Words of the National Congress of Mothers First Annual Session* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1897), 7.

[27] Mrs. Theodore W. Birney, "Sympathetic Parenthood," in National Congress of Mothers, *The Child in Home, School, and State: Report of the National Congress of Mothers* (Washington, DC: National Congress of Mothers, 1905), 165.

[28] Sarah Blackwell Gober Temple, *The First Hundred Years: A Short History of Cobb County, Georgia,* second edition (Atlanta, GA: Cherokee Publishing Company, 1980), 418-419.

[29] Mabel Newcomer, *A Century of Higher Education for Women* (Washington, DC: Zenger Books, 1959), 53. See also Tiziana Rota, "Between 'True Women' and 'New Women': Mount Holyoke Students, 1837 to 1908 (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1983).

[30] Theda Skocpol claims that the NCM exploited the press to their advantage where other women's associations demurred from this. Skocpol, "Casting Wide Nets: Federalism and Extensive Associations in the Modernizing United States," paper presented at conference on the decline of social capital, sponsored by the Bertelsmann Science Foundation, Berlin, Germany June, 1997, 9.

[31] Florence Kelley, "Unseen Dangers to Childhood Resulting from Present Industrial Conditions," *Quarterly* Report 1, no. 3 (1901: 127-132 and National Congress of Mothers, Minutes, December 29, 1902, 87, PTA Archives, Chicago, Illinois.

[32] G. Stanley Hall, "Some Practical Results of Child Study," *The Work and Words of the First National Congress of Mothers*, 165.

[33] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 38, 40.

[34] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 38.

[35] G. Stanley Hall, "Introduction," in Alice McLellan Birney, *Childhood* (New York: The Butterick Publishing Company, 1904), vii, viii.

[36] Birney, *Childhood,* 2-3.

[37] Birney, *Childhood,* 148.

[38] Birney, *Childhood,* 158.

[39] Birney, *Childhood,* 138-40.

[40] B. Edward McClellan, *Moral Education in America: Schools and the Shaping of Character from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999), 46.

[41] Mrs. Theodore Weld Birney, "The Work of the Mothers' Congress and Clubs," *Coming Age* 2, no. 3 (1899): 251.

[42] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 21-22.

[43] Birney, "Address of Welcome," *The Work and Words of the National Congress of Mothers,* 9.

[44] Ross, *The Psychologist as Prophet,*139, 268.

[45] Mrs. Theodore W. Birney, "Address of Welcome," *The National Congress of Mothers Second and Third Annual Conventions, 1898-1899* (Philadelphia: George F. Lasher, Printer and Binder, 1899), 5.

[46] Birney, *Childhood,* 13.

[47] Birney, "Sympathetic Parenthood," 167.

[48] McClellan, 46.

[49] As quoted in Mary Codding Bourland, "Third National Congress of Mothers," *School and Home Education* 18, no. 10 (1899): 522.

[50] Birney, *Childhood,* 38.

[51] Sparks, 18-19.

[52]Sheila M. Rothman, *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the* Present (NY: Basic Books), 135.

[53] "Summary of State Reports of Joint Committees and Affiliated Organizations [to the Department of School Patrons], 1910-1911," *NEA Proceedings,* 1911, 1098, 1101.

[54] "Secretary's Minutes, Department of School Patrons," *NEA Proceedings,* 1916, 799.

[55] Reese, *Power and the Promise,* 218, 221.

[56] Carl Kaestle, "Foreword," in Reese, *Power and the Promise of School Reform,* xvii.

[57] Mrs. Theodore W. Birney, "The Power of Organized Motherhood to Benefit Humanity," *The Quarterly Report* 1, no. 1 (1900): 30. Emphasis in original.

[58]General Federation of Women's Clubs, Proceedings, 1905, 201-202; GFWC.

[59]Mary Abbot, "Education Committee Report," GFWC Proceedings, 1906, 205; GFWC.

[60] Issel as quoted in David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), 155.

[61] Gerda Lerner, "Community Work of Black Club Women," *The Majority Finds Its Past* (New York, 1982), 89.

[62]Charlotte Hawkins Brown, "President's Address," GFWC Convention Records, May 11, 1892; GFWC.

[63] Birney, "Power of Organized Motherhood," 31-32.

[64] Mary Codding Bourland, NEA, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses,* 1897, 864.

[65] Bourland, *School and Home Education,* 523.

[66] Bourland, *School and Home Education,* 523.

[67] Grant, *Raising Baby,* 37.

[68] Cora Stanton Brown, "Domestic Science," *School and Home Education* 19, no. 6 (1900): 297-98.

[69] Jane Bernard Powers, *The "Girl Question" In Education: Vocational Education for Young Women In the Progressive Era* (London: The Falmer Press, 1992), 16.

[70] Powers, 72.

[71] Powers, 28.

[72] Powers, 31-32; 66.

[73] Powers, 55.

[74] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 121.

[75] Powers, 72, 73, 86.

[76] Grant, 121.

[77] Birney, "Work of the Mothers' Congress and Clubs," 252

[78] M.A. Cassidy, "Home and School," *Education* 19, no. 9 (1899): 541.

[79] Grant, *Raising Baby,* 35.

[80]Birney, "Power of Organized Motherhood," 31.

[81]NEA, *Journal of Proceedings and Addresses,* 1908, 1217.

[82] McClellan, 51-53.

[83]Kliebard, *Forging the American Curriculum,* 44.

[84] Ninth Biennial, 1908, 309, 311; GFWC.

[85] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 158.

[86] Kliebard, *Struggle,* 99.

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